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We must not let envy win the battle

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The Prophet Muhammad is recorded by Abu Hurairah as stating that in worldly matters you should look, not at those above you, but at those below you. Only in this way will you be able to appreciate God's bounty.

In the distribution of worldly benefits, there is no uniformity; some have less and some have more. And this is a state of affairs which has perennially aroused envy and created friction in society. Now, if an individual compares himself to one who is apparently less well-endowed than himself, he will be filled with a sense of gratitude. But if he always has an eye on those who seem better placed in life, his soul will become corroded with ingratitude.

A simple way of guarding oneself from this emotional evil is to compare oneself to those who have less than oneself and not with those who have more. Sheikh Saadi (1213-1292) one of the greatest figures in classical Persian literature, writes that he had no shoes and walked barefoot.

Seeing people wearing shoes, he wondered why he had been denied such things. No sooner had this thought entered his head than he came upon a man with no feet.

He was at once full of gratitude, and thanked God for showing him the greater munificence of granting him the use of two healthy feet. God desires that each and everyone of His servants should be thankful to Him, but, for this to become a reality, we must all subject ourselves to a constant process of self-appraisal.

This means assessing the truly positive aspects of our lives in relation to others, and an unceasing scrutiny of our thoughts so that we should not unwittingly allow ourselves to slip into negativism. The sight of a man consumed with envy is the saddest of spectacles.

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